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ABSTRACT

This special issue of "The Leaflet" focuses on various aspects of composition. Included are articles on such topics as writing instruction as a process, not a product; technical writing in high school; using "junk" material to stimulate creative writing; discovering one's own voice in writing; teaching writing to high school students by instilling confidence; writing for particular magazines; and teaching propaganda techniques. (TS)

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## WRITING INSTRUCTION: PROCESS, NOT PRODUCT

by Gerald J. Zinfon and Charles R. Duke

When an individual starts to learn how to drive an automobile, his driving instructor does not place him on a busy street corner, point to a passing, expert driver and say, "See, like that, do it like that, d'ja see the way he signalled the right turn?" Training the student writer is no different in that respect. If the student views the perfection of the end product only and then sets out to try his hand, never engaging in the step-by-step process in the manner of the masters, learning in his own way, at his own pace, he may become discouraged and fail. Writing instruction in our schools and colleges should be taking scrupulous care in guiding the learner through the writing process and not simply displaying a product — the literature — pointing to it and saying, "See, like that, do it like that."

Sadly, though, we must recognize the fact that our schools and colleges remain the repository of tradition-oriented, teacher-oriented, reader-rhetoric-oriented approaches to writing instruction. These traditional classroom patterns are often determined by the books selected. Basically, and with precious few meaningful variations, the reading lists for writing courses are comprised of titles of three types of books: readers, rhetoric-readers, and handbooks of grammar, syntax and usage. Often what passes for writing instruction in courses using such materials is not writing instruction at all. The basic text is selected as a collection of writing models. At times the quality of these models varies greatly, ranging from the high caliber articulate piece to the mindless babblings of anger or protest, more useful for studying language behavior than for writing instruction. Regardless of variations in quality and subject, however, the model readings share a common, misdirected function and foster a single-minded approach to writing instruction. The model essays, or "pieces," are discussed in class as representative examples of what the student of writing is striving to master: good form, effective rhetorical strategies, nuances of style.

To achieve these respectable objectives, the student reads and discusses the finished, polished, honed, published pieces of others. He analyzes the strategies, the devices, the effectiveness; and for class meetings he is urged to discuss — often heatedly argue — the "right," "left," "moderate" issues of the piece's subject matter with his classmates. By analyzing and discussing the subject and the merits and deficiencies of the model, the student is learning "to analyze, to discuss, to appreciate, to . . . (fill in the appropriate word).

But what else does the student achieve? In a writing course where student and teacher analyze the finished writing of professional authors, the student also develops a sense of his own inadequacy in written expression. He does not learn to write; he learns to evaluate the written. In many of our

schools and colleges today, we have students who believe that writing is a precise product, an endeavor to be admired, envied, dreaded, and finally, to be emulated awkwardly in a theme per week. No wonder the student's mind and pen quit in disgust when his first draft does not approximate the quality and seeming facility of what he reads regularly in his writing classes: Hemingway, Kafka, Camus, Baldwin, Ellison, O'Connor. Not surprisingly, many student writers entertain quite seriously the notion that writers must possess some superior genetic force. For such students, writing remains awesome and seemingly beyond their grasp as a tool of expression. The mystery of how a piece got to be so clean, so well-formed, so precise, and so expressive remains the secret of the instructor — if indeed the instructor knows, being himself, more often than not, a product of the same literary training and a bearer of the "product" tradition. Such a tradition-bearing instructor fails to show his students that to learn to write one must come to an understanding of the *process* of writing and practice that process, not simply read, critically appraise, and then attempt to emulate the products of others.

It should not be inferred from this, however, that the instructor should withhold from his students the artful writing of the masters of past and present. On the contrary, the suggestion here is that the student be exposed to the whole truth of writing and that he be guided in learning that a writer engages in a process; that no magic wand passes over the paper leaving behind a masterpiece. If the student learns early enough that many writers — even the greatest — struggle and search, write, scrap, write again, fill the wastebasket, become enamored of mediocre notions, become tired of worthwhile expressions that took many substitutions to find, then, and only then, may he have a fair chance of developing the mental preparation that will enable him to learn to write in his own way. He must study process, not product. Or, more accurately, the student of writing must engage in the process that brings forth the product.

Donald M. Murray, respected teacher of writing, simplifies the writing process into three broadly conceived categories or stages: *Prewriting*, *Writing*, and *Rewriting*. Within this process the individual must find what is comfortable for him.

> The amount of time a writer spends in each stage depends on his personality, his work habits, his maturity as a craftsman, and the challenge of what he is trying to say. It is not a rigid lockstep process, but most writers most of the time pass through these three stages.[1]

The stages in the writing process closely parallel those found in any creative process. The first stage is an opening stage or a freeing of the individual; a person must open himself to past, present, and future experiences. The student of writing in this first stage, which we call *Prewriting*, explores his subject area. Often his traditional class time is devoted to reading and discussing, but the serious writing student should instead spend this time writing and discussing; in this way he begins to open himself to his experience and to explore what that experience has to say. The exploratory stage, the preliminary draft stage, is the crucial first step in the process, not the final one. The writer makes discoveries in this part of the process that are important guides for the writing that must yet be done.

The rough draft stage, or *Writing*, in the process — the placing on paper of experience — needs to be identified as part of an incubation activity; it is here, as the writer places words on the blank page, that his subconscious sorts out and makes preliminary decisions for the piece. In any creative process, this stage is characterized by considerable restlessness and frustration; so it is with the writer. Viewed in this light, then, the writing in the first draft can hardly be regarded as the writer's best effort to state his case, express his poetic intention, tell his story. However, much present-day writing instruction and evaluation end with an assessment of the first draft. Nothing could be more damaging to the writer.

In the process of creating anything of lasting value, inspiration and perseverance are followed by preliminary evaluation and then alteration. Research has suggested that revision, or rewriting, is necessary to some extent for most students. R. Baird Shuman's study of students' theme revision, for example, indicates that most students need some form of revision, but they do not know what it is or how to do it.

> The teacher must diagnose the student's individual writing problems as effectively as he is able. He must also be highly specific in telling his students what revision is and in what significant respects it differs from proofreading. Revision must be taught; it cannot be done effectively by a student who is merely told to revise a given piece of writing. The student must learn very early that revision is more than rewriting and far more than patchwork.[2]

John Maxwell, Deputy Executive Secretary of NCTE, responding to the National Assessment of Writing, observes that revision, not requested of the examinees as part of the writing in the assessment, was a serious deficiency in the evaluative procedure. How can we have a National Assessment of Writing if the writing instruction that precedes the evaluation,

as well as the instrument of evaluation, ignores what every serious writer knows: rewriting is an indispensable stage in the writing process.

> If students do not know how to revise, are baffled by the instruction or simply refuse to do so, can we say that *writing* is being taught in our schools? Or are we teaching rough draft writing and, like NAEP, calling it by a grander name.[3]

Perhaps if students of writing in our schools and colleges were exposed to the whole vision of the writing process — Prewriting, Writing, and Rewriting — our students might have a better chance with written expression. Rewriting might then become the joy of the craftsman and not the drudgery of the drone.

*Rewriting*, then, is that stage in the creation of a piece that parallels the final stage in the process of creating anything of lasting worth. During this stage the creator (writer) painstakingly checks, tests, criticizes, elaborates, and polishes until he is satisfied with the worth of the final product. Only after this rewriting stage should the student be led to think of his written effort as a possible finished product.

The testimony of the masters of all genres of written expression verify the importance of rewriting. George Plimpton, interviewing Ernest Hemingway for the *Paris Review*, discovered Hemingway's view of, and his commitment to, this final evaluative stage.

Hemingway: I always rewrite each day up to the point where I stopped. When it is all finished, naturally you go over it. You get another chance to correct and rewrite when someone else types it, and you see it clean in type. The last chance is in the proofs. You're grateful for these different chances.

Interviewer: How much rewriting do you do?

Hemingway: It depends. I rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms,* the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.

Interviewer: Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?

A distinction must be kept in mind when one discusses how quickly a piece is written. A first draft of a story is not to be confused with a written story, a submitted story, a published or publishable story. The great Irish

short story writer, Frank O'Connor, perhaps the ultimate re-writer, once observed:

> I don't give a hoot what the writing's like, I write any sort of rubbish which will cover the main outlines of the story, then I can begin to see it. When I write, when I draft a story, I never think of writing nice sentences about 'It was a nice August evening when Elizabeth Jane Moriarty was coming down the road.' I just write roughly what happened, and then I'm able to see what the construction looks like. It's the design of the story which is to me most important, the thing that tells you there's a bad gap in the narrative here and you really ought to fill that up in some way or another . . . . I've got to see what these people did, first of all, and then I start thinking of whether it was a nice August evening or a spring evening . . . .[5]

The rough draft stage is not a finishing phase; it is the beginnings of discovery. The writer writes his draft to discover what he has to say with the material he can muster at that time. O'Connor, asked in the same interview if he rewrites, responded: ". . . endlessly, endlessly, endlessly. And keep on rewriting and after it's published, and then after it's published in book form, I usually rewrite it again . . . ."

The writers who reflect this candor concerning their writing habits, practices, and idiosyncrasies abound. Their remarks on the writing process can be found easily and shown to the student of writing. Rough draft facsimiles of a writer's work can be discussed with the student; he can explore the "process" in other fields, too, like music, sculpture, painting and pottery; comparisons to the writing process in this fashion will help the student to develop a sense of his own direction. From this point, it is a short distance to the actual trying out of the process. Certainly this approach would be a more positive beginning than many students presently experience; at least then students would not begin their writing training by having products of others waved in their faces and by being admonished to follow the model, as if somehow this would magically solve all their writing problems. Let's be honest with students; if we want them to do it like the professionals, the least we can do is to show them what really happens in the writing process.

## NOTES

[1]Donald M. Murray, "Teach Writing as a Process, Not Product," *The Leaflet*, 71:12, November 1972.

[2]R. Baird Shuman, "Theme Revision: Who Needs It?" *Peabody Journal of Education*, 40:15, July 1962.

[1]John C. Maxwell, "National Assessment of Writing: Useless and Uninteresting?" *English Journal*, 62:1256, December 1973.

[2]George Plimpton, ed., *Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews*, Second Series. (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 222.

[3]Malcolm Cowley, ed., *Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews*, First Series. (New York: Viking Press, 1959), p.168.

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## TECHNICAL WRITING IN HIGH SCHOOL? WHY NOT!

by Robert R. Rathbone

Every year many would-be scientists and engineers enter our colleges and universities ill-prepared for communicating their thoughts in writing. On the whole, they are bright youngsters, with top grades and high achievement scores in math, biology, chemistry, and physics. But they just don't know how to express themselves clearly, forcefully, and concisely when they write.

Since these students will have to master the art of communicating if they are to be successful in their chosen careers, it seems reasonable to ask, why not begin their training in technical writing at the same time they begin to study the sciences at high school? Indeed, if the two disciplines are to be mated later in life, would it not be wise to begin the merger naturally and gradually at an early age?

I am not suggesting that a formal course in technical writing be added to the high school curriculum, nor do I mean to imply that it replace a required English course. Rather, I see a greater benefit in introducing a cooperative plan of instruction, designed and executed by members of the English Department and the Science Department. The writing instruction would begin modestly at the sophomore year, increasing in depth of coverage and importance during the junior and senior years. In this way, technical writing could be taught as an integral part of the science curriculum and not as a separate English subject. An English teacher would head the teaching, but would do so as a visiting lecturer — a writing consultant, as it were, for the Science Department.

A typical teaching plan for a school year would involve working with three science courses: biology (sophomores), chemistry (juniors), and physics (seniors). The objective would be to offer a three-year sequence of instruction in technical writing that would give the high school graduate the basic tools he would need to meet the challenge of reporting original experimentation and research at the college level. Although the plan would take three years to become fully operative, there is no reason why students who are already juniors or seniors when the plan starts could not be given some instruction.

The overall coverage and strategy for implementing the sequence would be determined by the English teacher and the three science teachers, with approval required by the heads of the two departments. The details of the syllabus and scheduling, on the other hand, would be worked out by the English teacher and the science teachers individually. The work load for the English teacher (teaching at the three levels) would be approximately equivalent to that for a regular English course. After the plan has been set in operation, little extra work would be required of the science teachers, since they would be releasing some of their class time to the English teacher.

Although it would be an advantage if the English teacher had experience as a technical writer, it is not mandatory. Experience as a writer and teacher of writing is essential, however. The fact that he (she) would be working with a science teacher as a team would go a long way to make up any deficit. He could easily meet the remainder by doing some concentrated

homework or by taking a mini-course for technical writers, such as those offered by several greater Boston colleges during the summer.

## THE TEACHING

All writing classes should be held in the science classrooms. (Operating on the students' home ground offers the teachers a definite psychological advantage.) The instruction would include lectures and discussions. Both teachers would participate, the one complementing the other. Actually, the two-teacher combination would be equivalent to an English teacher with a second degree in science — a rare species indeed and almost impossible to find.

The main role of the science teacher would be to motivate the students to accept training in technical writing as an essential part of their training in science. He (she) could stress the necessity of being a careful, objective observer and of gathering, recording, and evaluating data efficiently and accurately. He could show that a writer-report-reader combination constitutes a communication system and therefore can be analyzed as a system. From experience, he could talk about the writing the students will be called upon to do in the technical courses they might take in college. He could tell them how important a role written communications play in research and development activities. And he could provide a variety of technical publications from industry, government, and the professional societies for the class to dissect.

The English teacher, the writing specialist of the team, would begin by reviewing the writing process: outlining, writing a draft, revising. He (she) would discuss problems of approach and technique with the class and suggest alternatives that might help overcome "writer's block." He would not dwell on grammar, punctuation, and spelling; these matters would still be handled in the traditional English courses. Instead, he would concentrate on those areas in which technical writing differs markedly from so-called "creative writing": purpose, format, organization of subject matter, style, use of visual aids, and reader attitudes, habits, and needs. It would also be his task to convince the class (and perhaps the science teacher as well) that technical writing need not be strait-laced, dull or lack the human touch. And, finally, he would impress upon the students that clarity is the first basic requirement of good technical writing, that conciseness is desirable, and that the experienced technical writer can achieve both without sacrificing readability.

## THE ASSIGNMENTS

During the sequence, the students would be asked to complete writing assignments in the more common media: the laboratory report, the technical memorandum, the technical report, and the technical article. The science teacher would designate the project, unit, or experiment from which the subject matter would be drawn. The English teacher would designate the medium. Both teachers would grade the assignments, the final grade being a composite of the grade for the writing and the grade for the content. Under this system, the students would see how much the writing influences the overall effectiveness of a communication.

The following outline shows how written assignments might be handled at the three levels. Only those assignments in which the English teacher is involved are given. It is assumed that the science teachers would give other writing assignments on their own.

*Level 1: Biology* (2 special assignments)

Assignment: A laboratory report on the first major lab experiment assigned by the biology teacher.

Purpose: To establish the criteria for effective writing in this medium.

Assignment: A technical report on an individual project in ecology, addressed to fellow biology students.

Purpose: To test the students' ability to handle a larger amount of subject matter and a wider audience, as well as to establish criteria for the medium.

*Level 2: Chemistry* (4 special assignments)

Assignment: A laboratory report addressed to the chemistry teacher.

Purpose: To check how the students handle technical descriptions of chemical processes and equipment, and how effectively they use visual aids.

Assignment: A laboratory report addressed to the chemistry teacher.

Furpose: To check particularly on the students' descriptions of the problems they worked on and their evaluations of the results.

Assignment: A technical report on a major lab project, addressed to chemistry students not familiar with the project.

Purpose: To test organization of material, format, style, use of visuals — the works.

Assignment: An abstract of a chapter from the chemistry textbook or other reading source.

Purpose: To prepare the students for writing chemical abstracts, a must in this field.

*Level 3: Physics* (4 special assignments)

Assignment: A technical memorandum to the physics teacher proposing a term project or major work unit.

Purpose: To check the students' ability to clearly describe a problem for which they will be seeking a solution, their reasons for so doing, their plan of attack, and the audience they have chosen to address. Also to establish the criteria for the medium.

Assignment: A technical memorandum to the physics teacher reporting progress on the term project.

Purpose: To check if the student achieve continuity between their proposal and progress report; to see how clearly they report progress toward their objective and what they intend to do from now on.

Assignment: A technical report (final) on the completed project.

Purpose: To check on all aspects of the writing — from the wording of the title to the content of the appendix.

Assignment: A technical article on the subject matter of their term project, written for a general science audience.

Purpose: To test the students' ability to communicate a technical subject to readers outside their field, especially to non-scientists. Also, to give them experience writing in this medium.

FOR ALL LEVELS

Most high schools hold annual or semi-annual science fairs. These events are perfect for introducing written communications as a requirement

for all who wish to submit entries. Prizes could even be awarded for the three best pieces of writing. Perhaps a local newspaper would be willing to publish the one awarded first prize.

Something should be done about getting science writing published in the school magazine or newspaper. The articles would be addressed to the general reader, could be checked by the English teacher and science teacher if the authors wish, and then would be judged by the editorial staff.

If the school is in a metropolitan area, the teachers could invite the science writer for the metropolitan newspaper to visit the school and to talk to all interested students in a special after-school lecture.

Another effective way to motivate would be to invite one or several recent alumni, now in college and majoring in science or engineering, to talk to the three classes about their experiences.

Rather than invest in an expensive textbook, complete with exercises, it might be wise to find a thinner paperback and supplement it with style guides available from the professional journals at low cost. Many industrial firms have style manuals for their technical staff; these companies probably would be willing to supply copies to the school at *no* cost. Of course, a special shelf in the school library for reference books, etc. on writing would be most helpful. Some books also could be kept in the science laboratories.

Specimens of good writing in the various media should be on exhibit at all times. These could be changed regularly to cover current topics and should include writing by students as well as by professionals.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to sell the idea that teaching technical writing in high school will help the science student do a better job of communicating all along the line. My experience in teaching technical writing to college students has convinced me that the cooperative plan definitely improves motivation and fosters a willingness to devote serious effort to the writing process. The details of implementing the plan, as described, are purposely general. For a syllabus to be meaningful, it must be designed to meet local conditions and talents. One thing is certain: the plan will not work unless there is full cooperation between the English Department and the Science Department. The English teacher assigned to the job must want to do the work; the science teachers must believe in the plan and be willing to release sufficient class time for the instruction.

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## THE MURDER

by Debbie Allen

Sucker sat nervously tapping his yellowed fingers on the small, worn café table. The minutes seemed like hours ticking slowly on the clock. Sucker is a tall man — his blue eyes look gentle, his skin soft; but inside Sucker has a very mean character. He has no love in his heart, but hatred that builds up toward almost every human being he meets. His hatred for other people causes him to do a very rash thing — murder.

He was waiting for a man, a man who he could trust, a very smart man, a man who planned evil. That man came in the cafe' and sat down across from Sucker. His name was Cool. They started talking quietly on the one subject they were both familiar with — killing. Sucker, in a loud whisper, said, "I want to kill someone, Cool. I don't know who, or why, just the fact that I want to kill someone."

Cool looked at him hard, his black beady eyes boring into him. Cool opened his mouth, about to say something, but decided against it and just nodded. "Okay, Sucker," he said, "I'll go along with you. Just pick a person and a time and we'll do it. Yes we'll do it." Cool smiled a broad grin, for killing was a task he enjoyed more than anything else.

Sucker whispered, "Tonight, about midnight, when no one will be around the street, except a few people. Cool nodded and replied, "Who, Sucker? Who?" Sucker just smiled. He had no liking for Cool; the only reason they were together was the fact they both killed and were good at it.

Midnight came and darkness blanketed the once noisy city, and quiet took its place. Sucker went out in the street, walking slowly behind Cool, with just enough light from the streetlights to see where he was going. He swiftly took a pistol out of his pocket and said softly, "Goodbye, Cool; since you love killing, I hope you love this," and shot. Cool sagged slightly in pain, and in two more shots he was on the black street pavement, now stained red with blood.

Sucker was satisfied with what he had done and put the pistol back in his pocket, smiling. Killing contented him whenever he felt down, and tonight he was more contented than ever. He quietly slipped in an alley and started the long walk to his home in a happy mood. Only Sucker never made it home. Halfway there he was caught by the police, who had been following him; and after a trial, was charged with first degree murder and sentenced to death in the electric chair.

*Debbie Allen is the seventh grade winner of the Creative Writing Prize, Duxbury, Massachusetts.*

# TRASH OR TREASURE?
# USING JUNK TO STIMULATE CREATIVE WRITING

by Nancy Bowden
and
Lee H. Mountain

Before you get rid of your pile of junk after a good housecleaning, stop to consider the classroom possibilities there. Could some of it be used to stimulate creative writing?

Objects that look useless to adult eyes can be transformed by a child's imagination from trash to treasure. Little boys have always held in reverence the strange things they carry in their pockets.

A worn-out shoe, a battered helmet, a police badge, foreign coins and stamps, a bit of yellowed lace, a chipped arrowhead, a broken toy, old photographs and pictures from discarded magazines all have strange and wonderful tales to tell. Their exciting stories can be conjured up in the children's minds by asking a few questions and waiting patiently for their imaginations to take over.

### Using Objects

To begin the writing period, the teacher reaches into the mystery box and pulls out an old shoe. She focuses the children's attention on it and asks, "What sort of person might have worn this shoe?" The children brainstorm many ideas about the shoe's owner. The teacher accepts both realistic and preposterous answers and waits until many children have participated before she continues. She then asks, "What sort of life did its owner lead?" and again waits for many answers. She might wish to ask, "What kinds of adventures might the owner have had while wearing the shoe?" The coaxing and waiting continue until she questions, "Where might this shoe have been? What places did it visit?" When the children are sufficiently involved, the teacher suggests that they write a story about the shoe or its owner. The children are free to use any of the ideas they have heard, or they may think of something else to surprise everyone.

In this type of exercise it is essential that the teacher tolerantly accept a wide variety of probable and improbable answers. She must encourage many diverse answers so that the children learn to stretch their imaginative powers.

### Using Magazines

A pile of discarded magazines can yield a wealth of items that can be used as springboards to creative expression.

Pictures of old cars taken from magazines make an eye-catching bulletin board display. The children will laugh about the running boards of a bygone era and can easily be prompted into speculating on possible future features of cars. The teacher might ask, "What wonderful features would you like on your dream car?" After enough discussion has gone on to insure a flow of ideas, the children are asked to imagine their own personal dream cars. They then draw their cars and write advertisements for them. When everyone is finished, they will enjoy trying to "sell" each other their cars.

Magazine pictures can be photographed for use in a slide projector for a whole class activity, or they can be mounted on cards with several alternative questions that suggest ideas for individual writing activities. The final suggestion on the picture card is always, "Writer's choice — anything you want to say!"

Several suggestions for using magazine picture cards are:

1. A picture of a person calls for such questions as "What kind of person do you think this is? Would you like to have him for a friend? Tell about him."
2. An action picture calls for "What happens next? What is this person feeling? What happened earlier?"
   This type of picture is also good as the background for a "story starter." A picture of a baseball player getting ready to bat could have this caption: "Joe's mouth was dry and his knees felt wobbly as he stepped into the batter's box. Everything depended on how good he was today."
3. A fantastic or surrealistic picture might call for "Explain what you see!"
4. A crowd scene can be used in several different ways. The suggestions can be "Put yourself into the picture and tell the story. Pretend you are a reporter and write a story based on an imaginary interview with one of the people involved. Pretend to overhear a conversation between some of the people and write about it."

There is still another use for magazine pictures. They can also be made into puzzles to stimulate writing. The picture is glued on heavy paper, and several words are written on its face. It is then cut into puzzle pieces. When it is reconstructed, not only is the picture visible, but the letters have merged into words to use in the story.

* * * * *

There may be a wealth of creative turn-ons getting moldy in your closets. Take time to hunt for treasures in your accumulated trash. Your imagination may be stimulated by what you find there!

*Dr. Lee H. Mountain and Nancy Bowden are members of the College of Education, University of Houston, Houston, Texas.*

## VISITOR

by Ronald J. Goba

. . . in the window
they are all there:

(1) the girl who thought she was a pair
of cotton panties on a clothesline
(2) the boy who in a haystack fantasy
stuck a needle into his own thing
(3) the dwarf who will live
the rest of his life
with a mildewed carrot in his ear

they sit in padded chairs,
nodding,
like rows of solid pine boston rockers

there is something
in their tidy silence
that
stares through me:

down the hallway,
out the door,
into

the smallest
corners of my bones . . .

*Ronald J. Goba is Language Arts Co-ordinator for Hingham, Massachusetts.*

## VOICE: THE ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP

by Terry R. Hull

I had read and returned my first set of Basic Composition papers and was about five minutes into a prepared tirade against voiceless, mechanical writing when my students interrupted.

"Whadaya mean voice? I thought that was a major in music."

"Is it the same as style?"

"You mean point of view don't you? I used *I*!"

"These *are* my words!"

"Are you trying to say I didn't write this?"

Startled by their minor revolt, I tried again. I told them everything that had ever been told to me and everything I could remember reading about voice. Quoting the authorities, I talked about choosing subjects they care about. I talked about using their own words and the sound of the words in writing. I showed them sample paragraphs comparing voiceless writing to writing with a clear voice. But the longer I talked, the clearer it became that I wasn't telling them what they wanted to know. While everything I said was true, I had not really answered their questions; and their dissatisfaction was obvious.

"But you still haven't told us what voice is."

"My sophomore English teacher said that there's supposed to be a difference between talking and writing."

"I still don't understand what's wrong with my paper."

By this time I was beginning to understand that what they wanted was a dictionary definition or at least information they could write in their notes as "Voice is . . ." and enumerate one, two, three, four. I resisted this kind of definition at first, but relented when I realized that I was resisting because I had very vague notions about voice myself.

I dismissed the class with a promise to define voice for them at the next class meeting.

Cornered, I spent the next two days trying to order my thinking about voice. I thought about the class and their papers. Most of the papers had been poorly structured, if at all. There were many grammatical and mechanical errors. But the main problem with nearly all the papers was that they were dull. There was nothing inherently dull in the subjects they chose. Most were potentially exciting. But few of the papers revealed that the writer had any genuine interest in the subject. The language was stiff and mechanical, and the papers read like the directions accompanying the Federal Income Tax Forms. How would discovering their own voices help these students solve these writing problems faced by most student writers?

Discovering their writing voices is an essential first step for student

writers. Once they have found their voices, most of their other writing problems solve themselves. Finding a subject, a major problem for most student writers, is less of a problem for the student who has found his voice. He writes about what he knows and is interested in. He writes from and about his own experience.

Once the writer has the content of his paper, the form will shape itself. Because he knows and cares about his subject, he will automatically limit it; and he will have the facts and details to develop it fully. His language, reflecting both his interest in his subject and his growing confidence in his ability to write, will be lively and natural. The discovery of voice, then, sets up a chain reaction in which the solution of one problem leads to the solution of another.

My students had asked, "What is voice?" The answer to this question is inherent in the answer to the question above. But I had learned that, for my class, inherent was not good enough. They wanted a solid, tangible definition of voice. I gave them five.

1. Voice is honesty in writing. Honesty is caring about the subject and having it show in your writing. Honesty is knowing your subject thoroughly.
2. Voice is using your own words, not teacher-pleaser words of five syllables.
3. Voice is the right combination of words that describes things just the way you see them and makes the reader see them as you do.
4. Voice is the sound of the written words that makes the writing distinctive and personal.
5. Voice is the author's presence in a piece of writing. It is that which allows me to identify your paper from among the 23 I get each week without ever looking at the name at the top of the page.

In a writing workshop several weeks later, my students were working in small groups helping each other with early drafts of their papers. I overheard a young man in the class say, "Hey, Pam, this sounds just like you. I guess you've found your voice."

She has. And so have many of the other twenty-two students in Basic Composition, Section 3.

*Terry R. Hull is in the Department of English, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire.*

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# TEACHING WRITING TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: INSTILLING CONFIDENCE

by James T. Klimtzak

Much has been written about methods for the teaching of writing to high school students. Workbooks, sequential texts and essays concerning methods and their application offer ideas that are adaptable to the individual situation. Each method has the common objective to establish a measurable improvement in the quality of the student's writing production over a period of time. The numerous methods and varied applications, which often hinge on several other methods and applications, create questions in my mind as to what aspects of a method are useful to my situation, and when should I use the preferred aspects of a method, if to use them at all, in conjunction with other approaches. Every new year brings with it a new set of students which calls for a modification of last year's method and application to the point where you are again "playing-it-by-ear."

What fascinates me is the confidence an author puts into his suggested method. Many times the author of a method literally cries out with a salesman's pitch, "This will work!", or, "Try it, you'll like it!" What fascinates me even more is the confidence some researchers put in the student's capabilities and potentialities in their proposed methods, with the hopeful results that a student *can* himself write confidently and effectively. Teachers should be aware of this implicit fact in connection with the method, or combination of methods, they propose to use. We must be confident that all students will improve in their writing skills. Confidence must be primarily put in the student's individual potential and the possibility of broadening a student's inherent talents; or no method, whatever it may be, will be effective.

Students presume a confidence in their teacher because the teacher is older, or he may have an impressive degree or possibly several impressive degrees, or he may have an excellent reputation as a teacher, or he may have written published articles, or, and this does exist even thought it seems supernatural, he is a combination of all the above. This same confidence must be reciprocated. Students are young, and they have unique experiences and fresh, novel ideas. Students will work intensively at an appealing and challenging task. They are creative in their many and varied ways of expression. Why should we perpetuate a problem that has stifled good writing from many students for too long a time? Why should we wait until our students get older, until some are given college degrees, until some turn out to be teachers or professional writers, before we put our confidence in them as creative writers? As teachers, we must *now* have a belief in the

capabilities and potentialities of each student to produce quality writing as a student.

James Moffett in *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973) suggests a method which is explicitly dependent upon a teacher's confidence in the student. The basis of his method is discussion — talk among a group of five or six students. Moffett believes that verbalization of a student's experiences is the first step to a written product. Discussion helps the student recognize his own experiences and compare them with other students. Discussion also orients the student toward the audience for which he will be writing. The audience is not a teacher who sits in judgment of a written piece, but a group of peers who share, disagree with, and suggest improvement, regarding a writer's experiences, ideas, and word structure.

The big problem is making the transition from speaking to writing. Moffett suggests more discussion. The student writes what he has verbalized, whether it is his own ideas or a comment or modification of another student's ideas. At this point, students exchange papers in the group for verbal and written evaluation. The evaluation is not based on a "this-is-wrong-and-this-is-correct" approach, or a "pass/fail" approach. It is based on "you-*can*-and-*will*-improve." Grammatical and content evaluation are not totally constricted to standard usage laws which may tend to stifle a student's initiative and creativity. Rather, evaluation is partially based on restructuring the way ideas are expressed without changing the ideas. Students might suggest a "better way of putting it."

The teacher's evaluation of the paper runs parallel to the students' evaluations. The result of several evaluations of one written piece is a more objective evaluation and a possibility of multiple options from which the student may choose. A teacher's confidence in a student's ability to evaluate and suggest alternate ways of expression can only be an asset to another student, as well as to the teacher. It allows for more time to write more pieces and more evaluation. This approach promoted quantity that will eventually produce quality.

The Moffett method finally hopes to help the student develop confidence. The student is asked to be confident of his own ability to write and evaluate and to accept confidently the immediate feedback of others. Feedback, which is evaluation and suggestion, is not punitive, but is rather an opportunity to improve. It does not damage initiative and creativity; rather, it instills confidence in the writer that he can and will write more effectively.

Kenneth Koch in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* (New York: Vintage Books, Chelsea House Publishers, 1971) begins with the same premise as James Moffett. Koch suggests that before you engage in a method of teaching the writing of poetry, you must make the students believe you believe they are poets. He then proceeds to put confidence in their ability to create a free flow of ideas which are not stifled by an adherence to classical styles, laws of poetry (e.g. rhyme, meter) or laws of grammar. The poems are then read aloud for suggestions and evaluation from the students as well as the teacher.

Both Moffett and Koch rely on the past experiences of the students, the ability of the students to recall those experiences, to verbalize those experiences (group discussion), and finally to write in a coherent, comprehensible fashion which also depends on constant group feedback. Their methods offer nothing without a teacher's initial confidence in the future improvement of a student as a writer. No method for teaching writing to high school students will work if it does not primarily contain a teacher's confidence in the student as a prerequisite. For too long now confidence has been put into what the teacher thinks or knows or believes to be the only way of writing. Consequently, we find students writing for the teacher and being forced into a style of writing which is not uniquely their own. In such a case, the method will work, as all methods do, but the results will be minimal, as we are all well aware. The positive results will be gauged by the student's ability to imitate the method and what the method suggests. Creativity will obviously be minimal.

Our task as teachers is to adopt a method such as Moffett's or Koch's, or develop a method which includes a prerequisite where the teacher must initially exhibit and persist in demonstrating a confidence in the abilities and future improvement of a student as a writer. For once, we, as teachers, must believe in the person, not the mechanics; that is, in the student, not the method. When we refer to the coined statements, "You can't write," or, "If you keep doing this, you'll never improve," we are putting the method before the student. This only damages the student's ego, his desire to improve, and most of all, it shows him that you don't have confidence in him as a writer.

As Moffett and Koch suggest, the method should be "student-centered." The student should be the nucleus of any method, since it is the student who eventually verbalizes, writes and revises his own ideas. This approach can only promote individual creativity, and no longer make a student a "slave" to a method. Our work, as teachers, becomes one of being advisors, not judges. Our comments will be taken seriously by the student because our verbal and written evaluations will be based on our suggestions to the student for improvement, and not our assessment of a pass/fail paper.

As you can see, the teacher's role in a "student-centered" method is not made secondary. It is a more active role which allows for individual attention to students who have a need for more improvement than others.

The age-old problem of teaching writing to students can at least be partially alleviated if the teacher chooses a "student-centered" method. The prerequisite of a teacher's confidence in the student as a writer must be a teacher's guide in the application of a chosen method and a never forgotten premise in the implementation of that method.

*James T. Klimtzak is a teacher at Cardinal O'Hara High School, Tonawanda, New York.*

## ODD SONNET FOR A TEACHER

by Ronald J. Goba

Yesterday, of the first snow of winter,
in the unresistent room where he reads,
he killed, with impassive calculation, a fly.
Incredibly slow, it was, as doltish as an errant
reflex action of the knee. Dazed, it was,
before he even raised his tidy roll of lecture notes
to put the fatal blow.
A fluttering summer's butterfly would have caught
his breath, in unmoving, spasmodic awe.
But flies, who test as sudden quarry
his sedentary arm, die.
Quashed against the drawn green pin-striped drapes,
in sluggish, listless suicide.

*Ronald J. Goba is Language Arts Co-ordinator for Hingham, Massachusetts.*

## STUDENTS WANT COMPOSITION COURSES!

by Richard H. Dammers

The numerous changes in the teaching of composition in recent years have often caused confusion and uncertainty among teachers seeking a successful writing program. While some teachers swear by free writing, others defend a traditional study of grammatical rules. Variety in teaching methods is certainly desirable; a problem arises, however, when many teachers doubt that writing can be taught at all. Despair about the teaching of composition overwhelms almost all English teachers at one time or another. With an awareness of the discontent felt by both students and teachers, I polled students in my three literature courses for their experiences in language and composition courses — their expectations, disappointments, and suggested modifications. To my surprise, over ninety percent of my respondents agreed on the values of writing courses for both secondary and college students, urged a strong grounding in the fundamental concepts of grammar, organization, and sentence structure, and concluded that writing can be taught successfully. Many indicated a desire to matriculate for a writing course as an elective.

One student, voicing the often repeated concern of many students about writing weaknesses, put it bluntly: "I *know* that I don't know how to write well. I have a tendency to repeat myself, over-word, and use run-on sentences. My punctuation is awful and my spelling is fair. I can't write very well, but just the same I would like to." Others echoed these sentiments, often claiming that they had not received a thorough study of composition in high school. A trend toward more literature and less composition was in some cases identified as the villain behind defective writing. One student who sought a change suggested this basic curriculum: "First, teach new skills; second, apply the new skills; talk with teacher about errors; rewrite the papers." This apparent concern with getting down to basics was a recurring theme in the responses. One said: "I think that the basic fundamentals ought to be stressed." Another actually asked for more study of grammar: "The composition course I had dealt mostly with writing different kinds of papers. I would really like to have a short part in the course about grammar since that is where most of my errors lie." To my mind this is surprising; I had expected strong antagonism to the study of grammar; and there are many students, I am sure, who hate it. Nevertheless, there is an awareness of the need for basic grammatical and organizational skills in successful written communication; it is possible that this awareness may be enhanced by the scarcity of employment upon graduation from college.

As composition teachers will testify, getting down to basics while retaining students' interest is not an easy task. After a particularly bad day a teacher

may feel that teaching writing is impossible. Yet some of my respondents indicated that they enjoyed writing classes, recollecting with pleasure particular details of an especially successful assignment. One appeared pleased to remember a comparison/contrast paper planned by the instructor on the writings of Captain John Smith and Governor William Bradford. Another seemed to be thinking of his future as an English teacher: "One of the most useful daily writing exercises for the creative or expository writer is the keeping of a journal, . . . to improve a student's ease with the language and his love for it." A third recommended individualized instruction, whereby the teacher meets once a week or so, on a one-to-one basis, to explain the basics in composition and to evaluate individual work. Each of these responses approaches writing instruction from a specific point of view, yet all aim toward more effective writing practice, and all lead to the same goal — the practical skill of communication.

After collecting students' reactions to writing classes, I asked them how they would teach composition themselves; their responses for the most part advocated what teachers have been trying to achieve for years. "I would teach the basics of composition with the students writing a few practice papers to determine exactly what they need," one future teacher replied, adding, "I feel that I can adequately put my thoughts down on paper; I know most of the skills involved in writing as a result of hard experience." One student expressed a get-tough attitude: "In high school I would make the course required." Others, thinking through the problems of teaching composition more carefully, offered detailed solutions. One liked in-class papers: "I would let students write in class, analyze their own papers, and rewrite them two or three times. This process would allow them to see progress within themselves. In addition, rewriting another student's paper would afford the opportunity to work with different ideas and style." Another felt more self-assured in describing four essential parts of a composition course: a short, intensive study of grammar, a general survey of writing skills (transition, order of importance, etc.), lots of writing practice, and detailed explanations of improvements needed. Most of the replies followed these approximate guidelines. One differed, however, and this response should prevent us from becoming complacent: "I took no composition course in high school although one was offered," bluntly answered my student; "I felt a composition course would not be worth my time."

To conclude: my survey of students' opinions on the teaching of composition indicates a concern with clear and effective writing, a desire by the majority for writing courses on both the secondary and college levels

which emphasize grammatical, organizational, and stylistic skills, and a recurrent demand for individualized or small group instruction. A large majority of the responses testify unequivocally that students want and need composition courses!

*Richard H. Dammers is in the Department of English, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois.*

## WRITE ME A MAGAZINE

by Anthony O. Constantino

"Write me a magazine" has motivated this teacher's high school freshmen to write with interest, conviction, and enthusiasm.

How does it work? Really, quite simply. Each student selects a "magazine" for which he wants to write. It may be an actual magazine, such as *Seventeen, Motocross, Good Housekeeping, Popular Mechanics.* Or, it may be an original magazine a student would like to "edit."

All "articles" (a variety of your composition assignments) are related to the magazine chosen. Each student then writes about a subject area of his interest with which he is familiar. He can enhance his articles with pictures cut from real magazines, or with whatever drawings or diagrams he feels are necessary.

Expository composition becomes "How to . . ." features. The variety which each student can choose relevant to his magazine is endless. How to buy coordinated clothes, how to build a sundeck, how to bathe a baby, how to mount stamps, how to stuff a pheasant, how to train a hunting dog. How many each student writes depends on the length of the writing unit.

Persuasive paragraphs become "editorials." Here, each student can explain and defend his values about topics related to his magazine. "Teen" magazines usually elicit pro and con editorials on abortions or the legalization of marijuana. Other editorials deal with the proper age to begin dating, what chores each family member should be responsible for, how late a freshman should be allowed out of the house. "Trade" magazines have advocated stopping the exportation of lumber to Japan and banning the importation of Japanese cameras.

One camping magazine stressed the need (and methods) to preserve our state and national parks, while a motocross magazine argued for more stringent participation rules and enforcement of them at motocross meets.

Should the Indy 500 be abolished? Why or why not should gasoline be rationed? Why should babysitters be required to hold certification in first aid? What children's toys should be taken off the market and why? The possibilities are tremendous.

Descriptive paragraphs (visual or aural experiences) can be written in conjunction with collages which depict the essence, mood, or theme of the magazine. From wildly decorated hotrods to a bedroom "before and after" interior decoration, there are ample opportunities for your students to observe and record relevant descriptive scenes.

Creative writing can also be incorporated into the magazines by having each student write a related short story and/or poem. You might consider this an optional assignment, particularly in a heterogeneous class with a wide range of interests and abilities.

Each student, however, does have the chance to display his creativity, ingenuity, and imagination when required to write at least five relevant advertisements for his magazine.

Such ads must be intentionally geared to the expected sex, age, and interests of his magazine audience. The student can use pictures from actual ads or draw his own. However, he is responsible for an artistic page layout and for all meaningful copywriting. As a "copywriter," he has the opportunity to use simile, metaphor, alliteration, hyperbole. Also, he should be encouraged to use the Bandwagon, Testimonial, Cardstacking, Glittering Generalities, and Plain Folks propaganda devices.

In addition to these lengthy assignments, each student can also work on several "filler" items. A crossword puzzle of words related to the magazine's topic requires each "editor" to spell carefully. It also requires him to define words to be reasonably understood by another student doing the puzzle.

He can also be required to write a "dictionary" or "glossary" of at least 20 words or terms related to his magazine's topic. Again, spelling and concise definitions receive a workout.

Another filler which can be used is the "Reader Quiz" of at least 15 true and false and/or multiple choice questions related to the magazine's topic. The answers can be provided on another page. A student may pick several or all of his questions from the "articles" he has written.

Another area where a student can showcase his knowledge is in a "Letters to the Editor" column. Now, he is required to "write in" at least 10 serious questions (as always, related to the magazine's topic) and "to answer" them with serious suggestions. There is a good practice here, too, in punctuating dates and addresses by requiring formal letter writing.

At the unit's end, each student adds a table of contents and front and

back covers, appropriately designed, inside and outside. Perhaps the best feature of this "magazine approach" is that now each student has a totality, his own magazine of which he can be very proud. This seems to be more meaningful to him than returning his compositions as they are corrected or returning a folder of relatively unrelated compositions.

Talks with individual students, as well as informal class "surveys," indicate that virtually every one of the freshmen in the composition units prefers the "magazine approach." Almost everyone is enthusiastic and motivated to produce a good magazine. Each is able to write about a familiar subject; also important, each is able to work up to his potential. Since all work is done in the classroom, it is possible to give individual attention to composition content as well as mechanics.

With each student working on a different "article," you will have to shift mental gears rapidly as you review them all. But your students' interest, enthusiasm, and motivation will more than compensate for the fairly rapid speed at which they will operate.

There is one possible problem which this teacher has never yet had to resolve. So far, Lady Luck has been kind. No one has *yet* chosen to do *Playboy* or *Oui!* Hope you luck out, too!

*Anthony O. Constantino teaches at Masconomet Regional High School, Boxford, Massachusetts.*

## A POEM FOR PUPS

by Robin Peters
Grade 6
John Eliot School, Needham, Mass.

A content little puppy, his head on his paws,
Maybe chewing a shoestring, as he thoughtfully gnaws.
In the process of mischief, he dashes about,
His tail wagging bravely, triumphant and stout.

By the sparkle in his eye and his light-footed trot,
I know he's prepared some sort of mischievous plot.
But his conscience is clear; and he frequently naps.
He adores all attention, gained by popping up on laps.

He follows me always, exactly at my heels,
Especially if I'm preparing one of his meals.
When he proves tired, he buries his head,
And silently climbs up the stairs to my bed.

# TEACHING PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

by Helen Smith and Norman Walker

In Propaganda Techniques, a semester elective open to all juniors and seniors at Newton North High School, our major concern is that students learn to tell when communication is clear and truthful and when it's not. We cover some of the ways language can be manipulated to influence the thoughts, actions and behavior patterns of people as individuals and as members of a mass. Although the study of language forms the heart of our program, we also examine some of the ways that graphics, statistics, sound and film can serve the propagandist. We aim to develop critical responses to the various techniques and to raise questions about the ethical and intellectual implications of propaganda in general.

The course began five years ago — partly as a result of one teacher's interest in the subject and partly in response to increased student interest in propaganda during the Vietnam era. In those days students were interested in the power of government and of media to "sell" ideas and in turn became fascinated as they became involved one way or another in the counter-propaganda movement. Although not all teachers now approach the course in exactly the same way, we agree that the study of language is imperative. We also agree that students are required to work on an original research project throughout the semester.

One way to organize the units in the course is in a progression from aspects of susceptibility to propaganda through various kinds of propaganda techniques to a critical overview of printed and electronic news media. Then, in the final weeks, each student presents his project. What follows is a narrative of the course.

As an introduction, we raise questions about some of the reasons language can influence people to surrender control of their lives. With readings like Auden's *Unknown Citizen* and Orwell's *1984* as frames of reference, students begin to consider the various dimensions of language that can be used by the propagandist to serve his interests. After a brief study of the history of language, we move to a discussion of denotation and connotation. Students see how the multiple meanings and emotional associations that evolve over the years can work to the advantage of propagandists. We do not try to belittle the rich variety of language or the potential for artistic use of the various dimensions, but we want students to see that the growth of language through the centuries can be a mixed blessing. In the study of denotation we show how the variety of meanings can be a particular problem when it comes to abstract words such as free, love, peace, and justice. This study leads to consideration of "weasel words," words which have lost much of their life through constant misuse and abuse.

Several classes have noted a connection between our society's acceptance of abuses of a perfectly good word like nature (Enjoy the natural taste of Winston; Natural Hair Color with Clairol) and "War is Peace . . . Freedom is Slavery . . . Ignorance is Strength" in *1984*. As students struggle with the implications of Newspeak and find contemporary examples which might fit the A, B, or C vocabularies, they begin to take Orwell's thesis quite seriously.

Another part of the work early in the term is to help students choose a topic for their research projects. The emphasis is on finding something that will involve minimal use of secondary sources and maximum opportunity to analyze raw material first-hand. Some of the topics we suggest to students include:

1. Make a dictionary of weasel words.
2. Select a word, phrase or saying that is in vogue today; then collect examples of its use in the media. Show how the word or phrase is used merely to evoke in an audience an automatic, emotional response which would eventually lead to some specific actions on the part of that audience.
3. Read *The News Twisters* by Edith Efron. Keep a record of twists in newscasts during the semester.
4. Using the media available at school:
   a. convince in-coming sophomores that Newton North is a terrible place.
   b. convince them it is a wonderful place.
5. Select some idea "whose time has come" and follow its development in the media. After you have collected and analyzed all the material you can gather, sift through it, trying to determine how many propaganda techniques have been used to insure the idea's acceptance by the public.
6. Choose a controversial issue in Newton. Gather literature and attend forums, etc. Note the propaganda techniques employed by either side. Separate the issue from the propaganda.

After this introduction, we proceed to examine various kinds of informal fallacies, progressing from the most primitive and easily detected to the more subtle ways of using and misusing argument to bring about certain kinds of actions and to reinforce or modify prejudices. Various names have been attached over the years to the techniques; but regardless of what they are called, the arguments appeal to pity, fear, desire for power or popularity, and trust in authority in its various forms.

Toward the beginning of this unit, students analyze radical literature of the left and right. Classes have generally concluded that no particular group is any more honest than another in presenting its views to the general public. It is quite worthwhile for the students to see that the John Birch Society and the S.D.S. have more in common than either group would like to admit.

We turn next to some of the ways anger can be expressed with persuasive impact through irony and satirical overstatement. Selections by John Steinbeck and Dick Gregory have been useful here. The culmination of this section comes with Swift's "Modest Proposal." Usually, most of the class responds to it as satire, and everyone can find examples of informal fallacies we have covered. Students then present modest proposals to the class in speeches. The object of these speeches is to make a moral point on a school-related issue through the use of misanthropic exaggeration. (No student has yet attempted to create a Swiftian persona.)

After this rather literary interlude, Madison Avenue's uses of propaganda techniques can be a welcome change of pace. We study the psychological needs to which ad writers and designers may respond through skilled and often highly creative uses of language, graphics, typography, sound and film. We find it hard to avoid Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*, though there are many newer books explaining the same concept of "subconscious motivation": e.g. *The Selling of the President* for politics, *The Depth Merchandisers* for advertising and *Opinion Makers* for news. According to Jacques Ellul's description of propaganda, advertising may be somewhat less sinister than these writers would like us to believe. What is important, however, is to ask the students to consider what insights these materials offer into the nature of human communication and to what extent these materials carry their own propaganda momentum. With every book we read in the course we constantly ask the double question: "What propaganda techniques does the author *use* to get our attention and what propaganda techniques does he *call* to our attention?"

Toward the end of this section of the course, we cover informal fallacies involving deceptive use of figures and faulty classification. Huff's *How to Lie With Statistics* and Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* have been useful here. Carroll's logical pranks give us a starting point for a brush with syllogisms. Though we cannot afford to spend much time on formal logic, we do show how invalid arguments can get past people simply because the conclusion is true and how valid arguments inherently have persuasive powers.

In the last weeks before the projects are presented, we focus on slanting and selectivity in the news media. We look at news values, news gathering techniques and audience expectations as they influence selectivity on the part of news editors. We do some layouts for the school paper, slanting the front page to promote various images of Newton North and its students. After some exercises in the detection of overt and covert editorializing on the air, we prepare our own newscast.

Because Propaganda Techniques is a survey, there is a continual sense

of glossing over subjects which could be entire courses in themselves. However, as students get into their own research, the class work takes on added depth. Whether we are examining propaganda techniques used by political, business or any other interest groups, students take part in increasingly thoughtful discussions about the morality of language.

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## AN IRREVERENT EXPLOITATION OF TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR or PLEASE PASS THE MORPHEME; GRA-MAR FRACTURED HIS PHRASE

by Steven D. Pike

Swinging swiftly from K-terminal to T-terminal string, ever alert for deadly Dangling Modifiers, Gra-Mar, Lord of the Jungle, raced through the lush, proliferous trees of derivation toward his newly-erected home in the Robert's Range.

As his powerful arms pumped automatically through the rich verbiage, Gra-Mar reminisced about his epic rise from starveling in a savagely competitive land to undisputed Lord of the Jungle. To attain his pre-position, he had battled many high and puissant foes: Para-Digm of the Old School in the village, who still commanded a few underfed Methuselahs; Parse-All of the ubiquitous Intellectual Desert, who stultified all who came near; and — most deadly of all — Anti-Gram, who eroded many youngsters' will power, causing them to follow evil paths.

Gra-Mar, however, had been victorious in many affrays, and wore many honors around his bronzed neck: the Repeated Order of the English Department, the Dollar of the Taxpayer, and even the Modal of Honor. In fact, his only real worry now was his lateness for dinner, caused by some non standard dalliance at a semantical conjunction.

Even as Gra-Mar was transforming vast distances into mere moments, a sinister pair of eyes measured his progress from behind a string of ripe verbs with pungent adverbial blossoms. Quickly, a hand darted from the blossoms, removed a vital V-transitive from a string Gra-Mar was obliged to

use, and substituted a weak, obsolete linking verb. Chuckling insanely to itself, the evil figure slipped away, confident that Gra-Mar would be spattered on the jungle floor.

Gra-Mar, however, was not passive. He saw the unseemly change at once, performed the obligatory transformation in middle verb, and transformed the outmodaled linking verb into a more becoming one.

"Yet another poor deluded student has tried to thwart Gra-Mar and failed," thought Gra-Mar tolerantly, and he continued unruffled on his way.

Meanwhile, at Gra-Mar's home, his lovely wife Nu-Cleo, Miss Morphological of '71 and Chairwoman of the Mandatory Auxiliary, was past tenseness at Gra-Mar's lateness. "I know he isn't off conjugating," she mused, "because he outlawed that after his terrible experience with that irregular imperative."

Then the thought struck. "Do you suppose he's in trouble with that fiendish villain, Anti-Gram?" Terrified, she summoned her handsome, demonstrative young son and said, "Such usage by your father is certainly non-standard. I want you to go find him for me." To add fuel to her son's fires, she added, "Perhaps he'll take you into the business if you help him."

Her son, known only as Non-Def until he earned a real name, jerked upright with excitement at the hinted gift. Long had he yearned for a proper name, feeling himself to be non count without one. So severe had been his despondency of late that he had even refused to count common nouns. His poor mother, while assuring herself that his negative demonstrations were only a phrase he was going through, was becoming quite concerned.

Because of his ambition, however, he responded eagerly, "Never Fear, Mother. I shall find our Lord and bring him safely home." And off he flew in search of Gra-Mar.

As Non-Def disappeared, Nu-Cleo compared him with Gra-Mar as he had been before her simple beauty had brought him before the Cardinal's altar to exchange their formal T-Do's. The boy certainly had his father's determiners, she thought fondly.

Unaware of his wife's anxiety or his son's search, Gra-Mar at that moment was sitting and thinking of possible excuses for his delinquency. Suddenly, plural shouts shattered the calm of the jungle. The first one was an unmistakable shout of triumph; the next was an unquestionable shout of extreme pleasure or discovery.

Imagine Gra-Mar's consternation when, after racing to the source of the commotion, he found his own son clinging nonchalantly to a Dangling Modifier and twirling a definite Ambiguity about his head. To further confound his poor father, the boy gave him a look that contained a

forbidden, but obvious, imperative! As the awful truth became clear to Gra-Mar, his son broke into a wide smile of glee.

"Yes," he said, "I has finded a ultimatest Truth. I meeted a wisest man here whose trap was waited for you, but I am better then you old fossil." The look on his father's face only egged the boy's malice to continue, "I here meeted . . . Anti-Gram, and him me giving name you not me give! What's morest, name is. . ."

"Stop! Repent now, Son, while there is yet an adverb of time left," pleaded Gra-Mar. Then, more firmly, he warned, "Repent, I say, before you commit the Original Syntax!"

"You can no me stop you old has be!" shouted the feverish boy. "No more does I ever listed time more once! You name my know? Me I call name mine are now . . . Nogram- Ar- Atall!"

After hearing these base words, Gra-Mar of course had no choice. He applied a T-deletion to the boy and went home to supper.

When his wife saw his countenance, she knew immediately what had happened. "Not again," she said in mixed sadness and frustration.

"Again," he acknowledged resignedly. "Another damned Ungrammatical Kernel that didn't pan out. They just can't push morphemes the way their Dad can."

"We'll just have to generate another," his wife soothed promisingly.

"Yes," he answered with just a touch of eagerness, "and to make it interesting, let's try reassertion this time."

"Why Gra-Mar!" replied his demure wife. "You say the most romantic things."

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## BACK PAGES

by Paul B. Janeczko

If you've ever attended a regional or a national convention for English teachers, you are aware of the state of composition instruction. Every convention offers numerous sessions aimed at improving the teaching of writing. This abundance of advice — sometimes practical, sometimes not — is also reflected in the printed material designed to make better writers of our students. Much of the available material is simply a repackaging of old stuff.

Luckily, however, there are a number of items that have risen to the surface of the sea in which many of us are foundering.

As in so many other areas, Scholastic Book Services has provided two winners. *Come to your Senses* is a "program in writing/awareness" created by David A. Sohn, who feels that a good picture can provoke a thousand words. The set consists of four filmstrips of 36 frames each, a packet of 32 8"x10" black and white photographs, and seven posters. All the photographs are student works selected from award winners in the Scholastic Art and Photography Awards contests of the past ten years. Each of the filmstrips is organized in a loose sequence, and the filmstrips themselves comprise a sequence: "Using Your Senses," "Relationships," "The Drama of People," and "Telling a Story." Sohn encourages teachers to use the filmstrips in different sequences, experimenting until the best approach is found. The 32 photographs are for individual and out-of-class work. The posters are intended to enhance the visual environment of the classroom. Taken together, these components make *Come to Your Senses* an exciting visual approach to writing and one that can easily be used to fulfill students' individual needs. For $37.50, a school can easily get its money's worth on this program.

*Eye Openers*, another writing/awareness program from Scholastic, is much the same as *Come to Your Senses*, although it does have the advantage of more flexibility. This set contains 95 exquisite slides and 49 glossy photographs. The slides, placed in a carousel that is included, are arranged so they follow a sequence that will lead the student through such activities as writing a description paragraph, using figurative language, using different points of view, writing dialogue, and writing a short story. The creators of this program, David A. Sohn and Don Blegan, emphasize, however, that their arrangement is only one of the countless arrangements that can be used successfully. Flexibility and creative experimentation should make this Scholastic program a definite winner in your writing program and well worth the initial outlay of $74.50.

What I liked best about both Scholastic programs is the idea that the teacher can make a program that fits his students' needs. He can use the program as it is explained in the helpful teaching guide, or he can experiment and design his own writing program.

McDougal, Littell is a newcomer to the field of textbook publishing, yet they have established an outstanding track record, notably with their *Man* series. Recently they have extended their efforts to include material dealing with composition. Their newest endeavors are *Write Away*, a non-book writing program for grades 6-8, and *Language Lives*, four books designed

for high school use.

*Write Away* is a set of 48 8"x10" black and white photographs printed on heavy cards that should enjoy a long life. The reverse side of each photo carries a brief, unstructured, and open-ended assignment. Students are asked to try various writing forms including paragraph, story, poem, recipe, tall tale, newspaper ad, and extended metaphor. Writing assignments are created to elicit description, explanation, narration, fantasy, and dream, to name a few. The kids should love the photographs because they are sometimes unusual, sometimes dramatic, but always provocative. The price of *Write Away* is $28.95.

The *Language Lives* series is not yet complete. *Grammar Lives* and *Language Lives*, both for grade 9 and above, are ready for classroom use, however. If they are any indication of what the remaining two volumes will be like, this series should be another success for McDougal, Littell. The books I have seen are put together with the fun and creativity one has come to expect from the *Man* series folks. The emphasis in these books is on the fascination of language. The exercises and activities will engage the students because they deal with real topics. Students write advertising copy using *Adspeak*, a mock movie script, a survey of the language of the surrounding community.

The state of composition teaching is mirrored in a recent NCTE publication, *They Really Taught Us How To Write*, edited by Patrica A. Geuder, Linda K. Harvey, Dennis Loyd, and Jack D. Wages. This collection contains nearly 35 essays written by teachers whose students have won NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing. Some of the articles are philosophical, others are practical; but they all offer helpful suggestions and insights about teaching composition. If you want a good idea of what other English teachers are doing in composition, read this book.

If you're looking for a book that explains a successful writing program, you might turn to *A Writer Teaches Writing* by Donald M. Murray (Houghton Mifflin). The author, in this case a Pulitzer Prize winner, carefully explains seven skills writers need, as well as seven skills writing teachers need. Murray also has interesting sections on a climate for writing, how not to correct papers, and how to motivate students. His program is a composition workshop with a heavy emphasis on conferences between teacher and student as well as among the students themselves. Although Murray's program seems best suited for small groups of older students, it is certainly thought-provoking and offers a clear insight into the process of writing.

When I read Stephen Judy's *Explorations In The Teaching of Secon lary English* (Dodd, Mead), I had mixed feelings. Not about the book; I loved it. Rather, I had mixed feelings about Stephen Judy. I felt sad that he no longer teaches in a high school. On the other hand, I was pleased that he is now teaching prospective English teachers. Hopefully, some of his good sense will be communicated to them.

Judy's book, subtitled *A Source Book For Experimental Teaching,* is a joy. It's the kind of book you read every year for new ideas and the psychological lift we need near the end of the summer. Judy has integrated solid pedagogy and practical strategies and tied them together with true wit. In the introduction he says that the truly effective method of instruction "must evolve from within. Through reading, thinking, talking, and experimenting — a process of trial and error — the teacher must discover his own set of strategies and approaches for his own classes." *Explorations* gave me plenty to read, to think about, to talk about, and to experiment with. Buy this book and read it from cover to cover. I don't think your classes will be the same. I know mine won't.

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